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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2301 (2016), by which the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2017 and requested that I report to the Council by 1 October 2016 and every four months thereafter. The report provides an update on the situation prevailing in the Central African Republic from the date of issuance of my previous report, 1 April 2016 (S/2016/305), to 16 September 2016, and on the implementation of the mandate of MINUSCA.

II. Major developments

A. Political developments

2. During the reporting period, and following the successful conclusion of the political transition on 31 March that marked a return to constitutional order, the Central African Republic achieved a number of significant post-transition milestones, including the swift formation of a new Government, the establishment of the National Assembly and the launch of efforts towards the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups.

3. Following his inauguration on 30 March, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra appointed Simplice Mathieu Sarandji as Prime Minister on 2 April. On 11 April, a new Government comprising 23 ministries was formed, followed by the appointment of senior members of the offices of the President and the Prime Minister on 18 May and 21 June, respectively. While the Government appointments were lauded as inclusive, the appointments to the offices of the President and the Prime Minister sparked criticism over the perceived exclusion of minority groups, in particular the Muslim community, and favouritism towards appointees who had served under former President François Bozizé.

4. On 23 April, the Transitional Constitutional Court announced the final results of the second round of legislative polls, confirming the election of 128 out of a total

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of 140 National Assembly members. Of the 128 elected, 50 were independents and 78 were affiliated with political parties; a total of 11 women were elected overall. Following the invalidation by the Court of the results in 12 constituencies due to reported discrepancies, legislative by-elections were held on 15 May and 26 June to fill the remaining Assembly seats, with support from MINUSCA in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and international partners. On 20 July, the Court annulled the results in the constituency of Bimbo 1, a suburb of Bangui, owing to discrepancies in the voting. On 2 August, the Transitional Constitutional Court concluded its work by submitting its final report, in which it proposed elements for a draft law on the operationalization of the future Constitutional Court.

5. On 6 May, the National Assembly elected Karim Meckassoua as its Speaker. As a former presidential candidate and a prominent member of the Muslim community, his election to the top legislative position was welcomed as a positive step towards social cohesion. During the reporting period, the National Assembly held three sessions, in which it elected its leadership, established its eight permanent commissions and debated issues of national security. Anti-balaka leader Alfred Yékatom, who is on the sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, was elected as a member of the National Defence and Security Commission.

6. Meanwhile, on 29 April, the National Electoral Authority submitted a request to MINUSCA for technical and logistical support to organize regional and municipal elections. In accordance with resolution 2301 (2016), preparations are ongoing to deploy an electoral needs assessment mission later in 2016.

7. The Prime Minister presented the Government programme to the National Assembly on 7 June. The programme, which was adopted unanimously, outlined the following four priorities: (a) peace, security and social cohesion; (b) economic recovery; (c) politics and good governance; and (d) social affairs and humanitarian action. Following security incidents in the third and fifth districts of Bangui in June, the National Assembly convened an extraordinary session on national security from 27 June to 1 July. On that occasion, the National Assembly issued a declaration with recommendations to the Government and to the international community, including calls for the adoption of a national programme on disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, the establishment of the Special Criminal Court and the lifting of the arms embargo.

8. In mid-April, the President initiated a first round of consultations with representatives of armed groups, during which he urged them to disarm in order to enable national recovery and reconciliation. The President's position that disarmament must precede participation in the political process generated frustration among ex-Séléka factions, namely, the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC), the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), which had demanded positions in the Government and reintegration in the national security and defence forces as preconditions to negotiations on their disarmament. On 18 May, after meeting with representatives of the armed groups, the President issued a communiqué expressing satisfaction with the results of the consultations and

committing to addressing the concerns raised by the groups, albeit following the completion of the disarmament process.

9. Armed groups broadly welcomed the establishment, on 2 July, within the office of the President, of a national coordination mechanism for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, security sector reform and national reconciliation, headed by the Minister Counsellor, Jean Willybiro-Sako, as Special Coordinator. Subsequently, on 24 August, the President appointed members to an advisory and monitoring committee for the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, including 2 members from the executive branch, 1 from the National Assembly, 2 from civil society, 3 from religious platforms, 28 from political-military groups, and 5 representatives of the international community.

10. The President met with armed groups during visits facilitated by MINUSCA to Bouar on 6 June, Kaga-Bandoro on 6 August and Bria on 5 September. Some ex-Séléka representatives in Bria conditioned their participation in the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process on the implementation of more inclusive policies towards the Muslim community. On 5 September, Mr. Willybiro-Sako met with representatives of the ex-Séléka, UPC and the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique (RPRC), along with anti-balaka, communal and civil society representatives in Bambari, where all expressed interest in the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme.

11. During his first months in office, the President visited Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and the Sudan to revitalize regional cooperation and mobilize support for his Government. The ninth meeting of the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic was held in Bangui on 25 August, under the auspices of the African Union and the Congo. Participants acknowledged the completion of the transition and the contribution of regional and international partners to the political process. They also decided to transform the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic into the International Support Group on the Central African Republic so as to continue to assist the country in its recovery.

B. Security situation

12. The security situation remained precarious, with heightened intercommunal tensions and sporadic clashes among fragmented armed groups. Violence among ex-Séléka factions and between anti-balaka and ex-Séléka was largely triggered by internal power struggles, competition over natural resources, attempts to expand areas of control, seasonal migration of pastoralists and intercommunal tensions. Throughout the country, criminality, banditry and grave human rights abuses by armed groups continued to pose a threat to civilians.

13. To enhance cooperation and information-sharing on security issues, MINUSCA started weekly briefings on security issues with the President in August. As a result of these exchanges, a joint coordination mechanism between MINUSCA, the Government and representatives of the Central African armed forces was

established to ensure better coordination and efficiency during security-related operations, build confidence and dispel misinformation on MINUSCA actions and operations. The mechanism is expected to prevent the recurrence of incidents similar to those that occurred in July and August, in which Central African security forces obstructed the Mission's freedom of movement.

14. In a separate development, the President has created a presidential security unit composed of some 175 Central African armed forces, police and gendarmes. Members of the unit have been deployed to protect the residences of high-level government officials in Bangui.

15. In Bangui, intercommunal tensions increased in June following the killing of a Muslim youth by a Christian youth that led to skirmishes between the communities of the third and fifth districts. Intercommunal tensions were further aggravated from 18 to 24 June with the arrest by internal security forces of some 26 Muslim traders travelling to Bangui and the subsequent illegal detention of six national police officers by armed elements reportedly linked to FPRC leaders Abdoulaye Hissène and Haroun Gaye in the PK-5 neighbourhood. On 20 June, at least six people were killed and one MINUSCA peacekeeper was injured during a MINUSCA operation aimed at extracting the police officers from the police station, which was surrounded by an armed self-defence group and civilians. Efforts by MINUSCA to enable mediation by local actors and to secure the area with the French Sangaris forces helped to contain the outbreak of violence, reduce tension between local self-defence groups from the PK-5 neighbourhood and the Central African armed forces, and facilitate the peaceful release of the six police officers on 24 June.

16. On 24 June, a non-uniformed MINUSCA peacekeeper was killed in the 5th district of Bangui by a member of the Central African armed forces and was transported by unknown elements to the Bangui General Hospital, where he was later identified by MINUSCA. An investigation was opened by the national authorities on the instructions of the Public Prosecutor of Bangui and with MINUSCA support. While the case file has been completed by the national police and transmitted to the Prosecutor, the alleged perpetrator of the crime has not yet been apprehended and a verdict on the case remains pending. MINUSCA actively engaged the authorities on this issue and urged them to conclude the process.

17. During the reporting period, ex-Séléka leaders, including FPRC leader Nourredine Adam, continued to deploy efforts to reunite the various ex-Séléka factions under a single command. Attempts to organize an assembly of ex-Séléka in Bria did not materialize as planned, in part owing to the refusal of the UPC and MPC factions to participate and to the presence and posture of MINUSCA in Bria. However, some ex-Séléka members still moved towards the area. Following months of speculation over a possible meeting of various ex-Séléka factions, a general assembly of civil society groups in the north-east is now scheduled to be held in Bria in early October.

18. On 12 August, a convoy of six vehicles with heavily armed elements, including prominent ex-Séléka FPRC members Abdoulaye Hissène, Haroun Gaye and Hamit Tidjani, attempted to depart Bangui, reportedly to attend the Bria assembly, forcing its passage in an exchange of fire with local security forces on the outskirts of Bangui. The convoy was intercepted on 13 August by MINUSCA,

27 km south of Sibut, Kémo prefecture. Four wounded ex-Séléka members, including FPRC leader Hamit Tidjani, were apprehended and moved to the MINUSCA level II hospital in Bangui with the agreement of the Central African judicial authorities. A total of 11 intercepted ex-Séléka fugitives have since been handed over to the national authorities in Bangui and were subsequently detained at Camp de Roux. On 3 September, some remaining ex-Séléka fugitives clashed with the local population 7 km north of Dékoa, Kémo prefecture, resulting in three deaths (two civilians and one ex-Séléka fugitive). MINUSCA has continued the search for the remaining fugitives and the Government has repeatedly called on them to disarm and surrender in order to face trial.

19. In the western part of the country, attacks and exactions against civilians continued, owing to the strong presence of anti-balaka. In the north-western part of the country, security issues associated with the seasonal movement of Fulani pastoralists peaked in the month of May, with the most violent incidents reported along the country's transhumance corridors in Ouham prefecture. The presence of armed groups claiming to protect mainly Fulani pastoralists, among others, in particular Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R), FPRC and MPC, further aggravated tensions, resulting in clashes with anti-balaka and the Front démocratique pour le peuple centrafricain (FDPC), for whom cattle theft is a significant source of income.

20. In the central and north-eastern part of the country, ex-Séléka factions continued to compete for expanded control over illegal taxation schemes. In Bambari, the situation became increasingly tense as a result of infighting between Arab dissidents under UPC leader Abdoulaye Faya and Fulani elements loyal to UPC leader Ali Darassa. Following clashes between both factions on 4 July that resulted in 14 UPC fatalities, 34 dissidents, including Abdoulaye Faya, sought shelter in the MINUSCA camp. The group agreed to enter into the pre-disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and was transferred to Kaga-Bandoro on 2 September, but the dissidents have yet to honour their commitment.

21. In the south-eastern part of the country, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to pose a threat to the population, with 143 abductions reported in Haute-Kotto, Haut-Mbomou, and Mbomou (mainly around Rafaï) prefectures during the reporting period. On 17 April, a MINUSCA peacekeeper was killed in Rafaï by unknown assailants while trying to rescue a presumed LRA member from being lynched by a mob. On 7 June, tensions rose in Zémio, Haut-Mbomou prefecture, between the local population and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) troops serving under the African Union Regional Task Force following the arrest of one civilian by the local gendarmerie over a case involving a stolen UPDF weapon. The incident led to the death of a UPDF soldier, allegedly stabbed by locals, and the subsequent killing of a civilian by a UPDF soldier in retaliation, prompting demonstrations by the local population in Obo and Zémio. On 25 August, one UPDF soldier was killed and two wounded in an attack by LRA elements near Keteisa village, Haut-Mbomou prefecture, 60 km north-east of Zémio. This was the first case of UPDF casualties caused directly by counter-LRA operations in three years. Pursuant to its mandate to protect civilians, MINUSCA reinforced its presence in LRA-affected areas and strengthened its information-gathering activities with the Regional Task Force. On 20 May, the Government of Uganda announced its

intention to withdraw its forces from the Regional Task Force by the end of December 2016.

C. Reconciliation

22. The Government has not endorsed a national reconciliation strategy or initiated concrete activities to foster dialogue between communities, although the President has repeatedly and publicly espoused his commitment to this priority objective. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued advocating with the Government to adopt a strategy on national reconciliation that fosters dialogue between communities. On 27 June, following heightened intercommunal tensions in Bangui, the President hosted an Iftar dinner to commemorate Ramadan as part of efforts to reduce tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. It was the first time a Head of State had hosted a Muslim holiday in the Central African Republic. The President also visited the Muslim-dominated PK-5 neighbourhood to celebrate the Eid al-Adha holiday.

23. MINUSCA, together with the United Nations country team and international partners, supported a number of local dialogue initiatives by national stakeholders, including members of civil society, to address communal tensions over internal and cross-border transhumance issues, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and threats posed to communities by armed groups. MINUSCA and its partners also supported communities in seven locations across the country to create local peace committees to address restrictions on freedom of movement and promote coexistence among different communities. Some members of the Muslim community thereafter voluntarily returned to their former homes in Carnot, Mambéré-Kadéï prefecture.

24. MINUSCA, the United Nations country team, local authorities and members of civil society continued to carry out initiatives to address young people at risk in Bambari, Bangui, Bouar, Bria and Kaga-Bandoro, with the aim of reducing the appeal of membership in armed groups through the acquisition of income-generating vocational skills. Some 13,000 young people, of whom 31 per cent were women, participated.

III. Protection of civilians

25. The protection of civilians remains a major concern, and State capacity to prevent and respond to protection incidents remains weak. MINUSCA organized 14 community alert network workshops throughout the country, while some 700 community alert network focal points received training and contributed to the development of community protection plans. MINUSCA also enhanced its coordination, training, planning and joint protection actions with national and local authorities in priority protection locations throughout the country, with the aim of building the State's capacity to address threats against civilian populations. For instance, following insecurity triggered in June 2016 by the arrival of MPC elements in Ngaoundaye, Ouham-Pendé prefecture, national gendarmerie and MINUSCA were deployed, followed by a joint protection team visit led by the office of the Prime Minister. Subsequent reconciliation activities in the area were

successfully conducted with local authorities. In addition, MINUSCA continued to support the establishment of local security committees in priority areas in Bangui, while also developing a strategic communications plan both aimed at perpetrators and intended to promote awareness on the protection of civilians, including with respect to accusations of witchcraft and the mitigation of protection-related risks posed by transhumance.

26. During the reporting period, MINUSCA carried out 18 joint protection team missions in response to protection concerns in priority areas throughout the country. Such missions by the joint protection team involved a wide array of efforts, including negotiating the release of civilians held for over a year by FDPC around Zoukombo (Nana-Mambéré); extracting individuals, particularly Fulani women and children, held against their will by anti-balaka in Baoro (Haut-Mbomou), Ndim (Ouham-Pendé) and Yaloké (Ombella-M'Poko); curtailing a UPC advance and exactions in Basse-Kotto and Haute-Kotto prefectures by recommending that the Mission take a robust posture; recommending proactive deployments and interposition by MINUSCA between anti-balaka and 3R forces in Besson (Nana-Mambéré) and Koui (Ouham-Pendé); and performing mediation to de-escalate threats to Fulani and other civilians at risk of reprisals following tensions between MPC/FPRC and UPC factions in Bambari, Batangafo, Kabo, Kaga-Bandoro and Ouandago.

27. The Mission has now deployed a total of 52 community liaison assistants in 35 temporary operating bases and 11 offices across the country and has continued to provide integrated protection training to incoming military and police field commanders so as to increase local community capacities and ownership in their own protection.

IV. Human rights situation

A. Violations by anti-balaka and ex-Séléka and other armed groups, including the Lord's Resistance Army, and national and international armed forces

28. The human rights situation remained a cause for concern throughout the country during the reporting period. MINUSCA documented 513 human rights incidents or abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against 1,387 victims, including 89 women, 56 boys, and 11 girls. The violations were mainly arbitrary killings and cases of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, conflict-related sexual violence and arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as abductions. The Mission also documented 27 cases of human rights violations and abuses related to allegations of witchcraft, affecting 57 victims, mainly women and children. Armed groups committed 341 abuses, 59 of which were attributed to anti-balaka, 178 to ex-Séléka and 40 to LRA. State authorities were responsible for 171 violations, the majority of which involved arbitrary or illegal detention, with the gendarmerie (73) as the main perpetrator. MINUSCA documented one case of a violation by international forces, in which a UPDF element was the perpetrator.

29. Most of the alleged violations were committed in the central and north-eastern prefectures of Bamingui-Bangoran, Haute-Kotto, Nana-Grébizi, Ouaka and Ouham. Arbitrary detentions increased, particularly in Bangui and in Mambéré-Kadéï and Ombella-M'Poko prefectures, with regular detention extending beyond the 72-hour legal limit, renewable once, for holding suspects in cells. This was owing to the lack of a functioning national judicial system in addition to logistical constraints. Two cases of extrajudicial killings were allegedly committed by police officers from the Central African Office for the Suppression of Banditry in April. The cases followed previous allegations of extrajudicial killings implicating the director of the Central Office, who was removed from his position on 8 June. MINUSCA continued to call for an investigation and prosecution in that case.

30. MINUSCA provided 59 human rights awareness training sessions to 2,762 participants, 598 of whom were women. Participants included government officials, civil society representatives, journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of armed groups. The Mission also conducted four workshops with representatives of the Government, the civil service and civil society with respect to the establishment of a national commission for human rights and fundamental liberties, as well as a truth, justice, reparation and reconciliation commission.

31. A total of 41 out of 50 requests for support to non-United Nations security forces, including members of armed groups, were approved, with necessary risk mitigation measures recommended when appropriate, in accordance with the human rights due diligence policy instituted by the Secretary-General. Three letters were sent to the Central African authorities, resulting in the suspension of United Nations support to a police unit and the subsequent removal of its director.

B. Conflict-related sexual violence

32. During the reporting period, MINUSCA registered 44 allegations of conflict-related sexual violence throughout the country, 25 of which were investigated and verified. The victims comprised 22 women, 21 girls and 1 boy. Twenty-seven of the cases involved rape, while 17 involved attempted rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage and/or sexual assault. Of the 27 cases of rape, 16 were perpetrated by multiple actors and 5 occurred in the context of sexual slavery. Of the 44 registered cases, 20 were allegedly perpetrated by ex-Séléka or affiliated groups, 14 by anti-balaka, 9 by LRA elements and 1 by unidentified perpetrators. The actual number of incidents of conflict-related sexual violence is suspected to be much higher than the number reported.

33. The Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, of the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, visited Bangui in June and urged the Government to appoint national police and gendarmerie officers as part of a rapid response unit to address sexual violence crimes.

C. Child protection

34. The United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting documented the recruitment of 33 children (including 7 girls) into armed groups, the abduction of 22 children (including 5 girls), the killing of 12 children (including 6 girls), the raping of 21 girls, and sexual violence against 1 boy. There were 26 incidents of denial of humanitarian access that impeded delivery of assistance to children. In 15 separate incidents, the use of schools and hospitals by armed groups deprived children of education and health care.

35. MINUSCA continued its engagement with armed groups to address grave violations of child rights and to obtain the release of children associated with such groups. In April and May, FPRC, MPC, UPC and RPRC leaders reiterated their commitment to MINUSCA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ending violations against children, pledging to sign related action plans. During the reported period, 612 children, including 89 girls, were separated from anti-balaka and FPRC elements.

36. In cooperation with UNICEF, MINUSCA carried out training and awareness-raising activities on child protection for 1,625 participants, consisting of 550 peacekeepers and 1,075 representatives of armed groups, civil society, the national police and the gendarmerie. MINUSCA continued to advocate with the Government to treat children associated with armed groups as victims of conflict and has urged that the final steps of ratification be completed for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

V. Humanitarian situation

37. The humanitarian situation remained dire, with more than 2.3 million of the 4.8 million Central Africans still dependent on humanitarian assistance. As at 15 September, there were 452,095 refugees in neighbouring countries and 385,750 internally displaced persons, of which some 150,156 live at 92 sites throughout the country. Over 36,000 people from minority groups remained at risk in Berbérati, Boda, Bouar, Carnot, Dékoa, Yaloké and the PK-5 neighbourhood of Bangui. The spontaneous return of a small number of internally displaced persons due to an improved security situation caused renewed intercommunal tension in some areas, especially in the south-western part of the country. The Central African Republic is also hosting 11,928 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan.

38. Humanitarian access to affected people remained constrained by logistical and security challenges, with recurrent attacks on humanitarian actors. Attacks by and hostilities between armed groups, in addition to conflicts related to transhumance, caused new displacements.

39. Two thirds of Central Africans have no access to health care, safe drinking water or sanitation facilities, while the country is regularly exposed to epidemic outbreaks such as measles, rabies and meningitis. International humanitarian actors, which support the majority of social services, faced serious funding challenges with

adverse effects on critical humanitarian activities. The Humanitarian Response Plan requiring $531.5 million is only 28 per cent funded.

40. On 10 August, the Government declared a cholera epidemic in Kémo prefecture, with 266 reported cases resulting in 21 deaths at the time of writing. UNICEF, the World Health Organization and other humanitarian actors mobilized resources to sensitize the population and to provide at-risk areas with medicine, potable water and sanitary equipment, including by engaging with the Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

VI. Socioeconomic developments

41. The economic outlook foresees a 5.2 per cent economic growth rate for 2016. The country recorded a 4.5 per cent growth rate in 2015, compared with 1 per cent in 2014. The inflation rate dropped to 4.5 per cent in the first half of 2015. The internal revenue forecast for 2016 amounted to $140 million. Public sector debt remains high, despite a drop from $8.7 million in 2014 to an expected $7.1 million in 2016. Dependence on external aid decreased but remained high in 2015, at 27 per cent of GDP, as compared with 43 per cent of GDP in 2014. The Central African authorities have expressed their commitment to sustaining this trend through a review of tax policies and better management of natural resources. On 20 July, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund approved a three-year funding facility of $115.4 million for the Central African Republic under the Extended Credit Facility, with an immediate disbursement of $17.4 million to restore macroeconomic stability. Financial needs are expected to decline from 4.8 per cent of GDP in 2016 to 3.2 per cent in 2019 if the trend towards peace consolidation continues.

42. Following the decision reached at a meeting of the Kimberley Process, held in July 2015, to allow the resumption of trade in rough diamonds from compliant zones, MINUSCA provided logistical and substantial support during the reporting period to two Kimberley Process review missions to various locations in the south-western part of the country. During these review missions, progress was assessed in terms of compliance with the three key Kimberley Process benchmarks for compliant zones: (a) sufficient presence of State authority; (b) free movement of people and goods; and (c) no systematic presence of armed groups.

VII. Extension of State authority

43. MINUSCA and international partners provided technical expertise to the newly formed Ministry of the Interior, Public Security and Territorial Administration, including developing synergies between the Ministry's civilian and uniformed personnel and a common vision for the Ministry. In July, MINUSCA facilitated a preparatory workshop to support the Government in designing an integrated strategy for the extension of State authority. MINUSCA also supported a UNDP-initiated survey, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, on the redeployment and presence of public administration in the prefectures, as well as the development of a handbook for newly deployed administrative authorities and

civil servants on local governance, ethics and combating corruption. To strengthen national security institutions and enhance their capacity, MINUSCA conducted targeted training of 513 police and gendarmerie officers in Bangui and Bouar, including 134 women, with the aim of strengthening judicial police skills, investigation techniques, community policing and responses to gender-based violence.

VIII. Rule of law

A. Implementation of urgent temporary measures

44. The President continues to express the will of his Government to fight impunity and has requested assistance from MINUSCA, supported by the execution of arrest warrants. During the reporting period, MINUSCA assisted the national authorities in the fight against impunity through 112 arrests and/or apprehensions, 49 of which were carried out under the Mission's mandate to take urgent temporary measures. The arrest and/or apprehension and detention of suspects has been particularly challenging in areas without detention facilities or State authorities to which a suspect may be handed over. Despite these obstacles, such arrests and/or apprehensions often contributed to a reduction in threats from the targeted armed groups. MINUSCA also provided technical assistance for 14 criminal cases against high-profile suspects, whose trials commenced on 25 August and were expected to conclude on 23 September.

45. On 21 June, the National Prosecutor requested support from MINUSCA in arresting six high-level individuals affiliated with ex-Séléka. They remain at large, but MINUSCA supported the strengthening of the case files against them. On 19 August, MINUSCA apprehended and handed over another ex-Séléka leader, Hamit Tidjani. Meanwhile, on 5 August, Jean-Francis Bozizé, former Minister of Defence and a son of the former President, François Bozizé, was apprehended by MINUSCA and handed over to national authorities pursuant to an outstanding national arrest warrant against him. He was subsequently arraigned by national authorities, which ordered his provisional release on a number of conditions, including that he remain at his residence. In line with resolution 2301 (2016), MINUSCA is developing a list of persons suspected of serious crimes and/or who pose a serious threat to security. The list is expected to provide a basis for prosecution of serious crimes by national justice institutions, including the Special Criminal Court.

B. Special Criminal Court

46. MINUSCA, together with the United Nations country team and international partners, continued to support the establishment of the Special Criminal Court, which saw some progress during the reporting period. The Government advanced slowly on the establishment of the Court, with the Minister of Justice approving the terms of reference and selection procedures for the international magistrates and the Deputy Registrar. The Minister also allocated new premises for the Court and

established a committee for the selection of national personnel, which has met four times and is progressing towards the proposal of candidates.

47. On 26 August, the Government, MINUSCA and UNDP signed an agreement for a United Nations project in support of the Special Criminal Court. International partners have either pledged contributions or agreed to support the nomination of international magistrates. While the committee established to appoint national magistrates has not yet initiated the selection process, the Minister of Justice declared his intention to deploy the Special Prosecutor before the end of the year. The first 14 months of the Court's operations are nearly fully funded, including the support to be provided by MINUSCA to the Court through the Mission's funding programme.

C. Justice and the rule of law

48. The Government and the national judiciary system have taken steps to increase the number of trials throughout the country, including criminal sessions in Bangui. MINUSCA continued to undertake capacity-building efforts for justice and corrections personnel, and supported criminal proceedings at the Bangui Court of Appeal in 58 cases. MINUSCA also provided assistance to national authorities for the training of magistrates, including the organization of the first competency-based exams for the recruitment of new magistrates, a key step towards enhancing the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary. To promote the legal assistance system, MINUSCA supported national authorities in developing a strategic plan for the Bar Association, trained 30 paralegals and provided advice and financial support for the National School for Administration and Magistrates.

49. Despite MINUSCA and UNDP support in the initial rehabilitation of 23 courts and the redeployment of magistrates to resume judicial activities outside Bangui, progress remained limited. While criminal trials have fully resumed in Bangui and partly in the western part of the country, some judges and prosecutors have left their posts owing to security concerns and the difficult working conditions. In some areas under the control of armed groups, the gap in basic justice services has been filled by parallel justice systems established by armed groups and/or religious leaders, while in a few areas, both local authorities and armed groups opposed the redeployment of magistrates.

50. MINUSCA continued to support the prison system and a limited number of experienced prison personnel through active support provided to the oversight and management of high-risk prisoners in Ngaragba prison in Bangui and its annex, Camp de Roux. The demilitarization of the prison system remains a priority, with a focus on establishing a civilian prison structure, including a new recruitment process and training programmes for both new recruits and existing personnel. During the reporting period, MINUSCA trained 175 members of the Central African armed forces and 41 national prison staff members on basic rule of law procedures. The Mission also rehabilitated and handed over three prisons, Bambari, Bossembele and Camp de Roux in Bangui, to national authorities.

IX. Security sector reform and vetting

51. The Minister Counsellor and Special Coordinator for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, security sector reform and national reconciliation presented the national security sector reform priorities at a high-level dialogue event of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform facilitated by the Secretariat in New York on 21 and 22 June. In their statement, the co-chairs of the Group underlined the need for strong political commitment on security sector reform to prevent a relapse into conflict, called for the establishment of a national policy and governance framework for the security sector, and underscored the need for coordination of international support within a framework of mutual accountability.

52. The European Union Military Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic concluded its mandate on 16 July. The European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic was established on 12 July with the mandate to play a critical role in defence sector reform and provide strategic advice to national authorities and training to vetted Central African armed forces.

53. In August, a Government-appointed ad hoc national technical committee reviewed and validated the national security policy, following two workshops facilitated by MINUSCA. The national authorities also established a drafting committee to develop a national security sector reform strategy, with support from MINUSCA and the Military Training Mission. A capacity-building and development plan for the internal security forces (police and gendarmerie) was finalized at a technical workshop held from 22 to 26 August, organized with the support of UNDP, the European Union, the African Union, France and the United States of America. The plan constitutes a sectoral reform plan for police and gendarmerie and outlines key reforms to be undertaken in the next five years.

54. During this period, MINUSCA began the rehabilitation of the Camp Leclerc military training centre in Bouar and continued to support the rehabilitation of Camp Kassai in Bangui. MINUSCA, in close coordination with the Military Advisory Mission and later with the Military Training Mission, conducted non-operational training for 167 officers and non-commissioned officers of the Central African armed forces.

55. As at 15 September, the human resources directorate at the Ministry of Defence had registered 7,478 members of the Central African armed forces, of whom 3,533 had been verified by MINUSCA. A joint task force of UNDP, MINUSCA, national police and gendarmerie undertook an identification exercise among the internal security forces, which resulted in the registration of 1,874 gendarmes and 1,154 police.

X. Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration

56. MINUSCA continued to encourage dialogue between the Government and armed groups in order to support the launch of the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme. During the reporting period, the Government expanded discussions on disarmament, demobilization and

reintegration to include 5 non-signatory armed groups in addition to the 9 signatories to the agreement stemming from the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation of May 2015, bringing the total number of armed groups expected to participate in the national programme to 14. Subsequently, the Government-designated representatives of each of the 14 armed groups were appointed on 24 August to participate in the advisory and monitoring committee of the national programme. However, some armed group leaders are rejecting the designation of specific Government appointees.

57. In support of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts, MINUSCA reinforced its technical assistance to the Office of the Special Coordinator for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, security sector reform and national reconciliation. In close collaboration with development partners, in particular the World Bank, MINUSCA contributed to the development of a new institutional framework for a multi-year national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme. The draft national strategy for such a programme is currently under review by the Government.

58. Furthermore, MINUSCA has been developing options for limited integration of armed group members into the national security forces, in line with article 7 of the Bangui Forum agreement on disarmament, demobilization and repatriation principles. On 21 July, the Government announced the establishment of a working group on integration issues, which the Mission intends to support as a means to encourage consensus among armed groups and the Government.

59. The pre-disarmament, demobilization and repatriation programme continued to serve as a stabilization measure by engaging armed groups in paid community-based projects until the launch of the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme. In this respect, MINUSCA pursued pre-disarmament, demobilization and repatriation operations in Bambari, Bangui, Birao, Bouar, Bria and Kaga-Bandoro and launched operations in Bossangoa and Ndélé. These operations were aimed at nearly 4,000 beneficiaries, of whom approximately 16 per cent were women, who received food on a weekly basis and participated in short-term labour-intensive activities that injected needed cash into local economies.

60. To bolster the stabilizing impact of the pre-disarmament, demobilization and repatriation programme and the planned national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, MINUSCA, together with the United Nations country team and with financial support from the Peacebuilding Fund, continued to support community violence reduction projects targeting both combatants deemed ineligible for disarmament, demobilization and repatriation and community members in general, including young people at risk of violence. In Ouham-Pendé prefecture, MINUSCA registered over 4,000 beneficiaries, of whom 25 per cent were women. In and around Bangui, MINUSCA launched a project for 3,000 participants.

XI. Weapons and ammunition management

61. MINUSCA, through the United Nations Mine Action Service, destroyed 2,192 items of unexploded ordnance, 62,516 items of small arms ammunition, 156,000

detonators and 63 tons of commercial explosives. MINUSCA established a temporary ammunition storage facility at Camp Kassai in Bangui, to store ammunition marked for future destruction, and installed a container for safe weapons storage for a gendarmerie unit. MINUSCA also supported national authorities in improving weapons and ammunition storage in line with basic international standards in five police buildings and one customs post. MINUSCA conducted 2,308 awareness training sessions on the risks of weapons and explosives and on reducing armed violence for 92,432 beneficiaries throughout the country.

XII. Coordination of international assistance

62. Under the leadership of the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Cooperation, and with the support of the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank, the technical work for preparing the national strategy for recovery and peace consolidation began in June. The document outlining the Government's three-year peace-building strategy will serve as the resource mobilization tool to be used during the donors' conference scheduled to be held in Brussels on 17 November 2016.

63. On 17 May, the Prime Minister issued a decree establishing a technical committee to develop a framework of mutual accountability with the international community, in coordination with and supported by MINUSCA. The committee began its work on 26 May and established a working group, through which a zero draft of the proposed framework for mutual engagement was submitted for approval to the technical committee on 15 June. On 23 September, during a ministerial meeting hosted in New York on the margins of the general debate of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, the President announced his intention to finalize the framework before the convening, in Brussels on 17 November, of the international conference on the Central African Republic.

XIII. Deployment of the Mission

A. Military

64. At the time of writing, MINUSCA had deployed 10,515 military personnel, or 97.8 per cent of its authorized strength of 10,750. This included 11 infantry battalions, one special forces company and several enabling units, including one military police unit, four engineering companies, one heavy transport company, three level II hospitals, three signal companies and three helicopter units, one of which is a combat helicopter unit. Troop-contributing countries have further improved the equipment of their contingents. In the reporting period, the Mission maintained 44 operating bases, comprising 34 permanent and 10 temporary bases. The Mission will adjust its military enabling capabilities by repatriating two of its three signal units and generating an additional engineering unit. It also continued to adjust its posture, including by reducing the number of bases, in order to provide greater flexibility, mobility and capacity to deter and counter threats and to support the comprehensive approach towards the armed groups.

B. Police

65. MINUSCA maintained an authorized strength of 2,080 police personnel, including 378 individual police officers (94.5 per cent of the authorized strength of 400), 1,400 formed police unit personnel (83 per cent of the authorized strength of 1,680) and 280 protection support unit personnel. At the time of writing, MINUSCA had deployed 90 police officers throughout the country: 23 in Bouar, 16 in Bria, 16 in Kaga-Bandoro, and 5 each in Bambari, Bangassou, Berbérati, Bossangoa, Ndélé, Obo and Paoua. In Bangui, the Mission deployed 288 police officers to various units, including 100 in mobile teams and for collocation with the national police and gendarmerie. Two Burundi-formed police units ended their deployment at the end of July, at the request of the United Nations; their replacements have not yet been deployed.

C. Civilian personnel

66. As at 15 September, MINUSCA had a total of 1,148 civilian personnel deployed (67 per cent of the authorized staffing), comprising 608 international posts, 383 national posts and 157 United Nations Volunteers positions. This is inclusive of the 206 new positions authorized for the period 2016/17. Women constituted 25 per cent of civilian personnel deployed.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

67. The Central African Republic authorities made efforts to resolve issues pertaining to the status-of-forces agreement. Although in a few instances the Government had attempted to reinstate the fuci tax, it recently confirmed that MINUSCA had been granted the exemption in conformity with the agreement. At the time of writing, the Government had collected $8.15 million in tax reimbursements from the United Nations, covering the period from April 2015 to June 2016, which is in violation of the agreement and which the Secretariat is attempting to recover. Other issues pertaining to the registration fee of 12 per cent per annum on residential leases and the 2 per cent tax on salaries and emoluments paid in cash and carried by civilian personnel when leaving the Central African Republic had also not been formally resolved. During the reporting period, MINUSCA and other United Nations agencies in the country experienced 22 cases in which Central African defence or internal security forces inhibited freedom of movement of United Nations personnel and/or assets. MINUSCA is engaging with the authorities on this issue.

XIV. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

68. The protection of United Nations personnel remained challenging as civilian and uniformed personnel continued to face threats posed by general insecurity and criminality. During the reporting period, 22 security incidents involving United Nations civilian personnel occurred, affecting 16 civilian personnel, none resulting in any deaths. One Central African casual day worker was temporarily detained illegally by ex-Séléka elements. Seven peacekeepers lost their lives during the reporting period:

one in Rafaï on 17 April and another in Bangui on 24 June; two in traffic accidents; and three as a result of illness (malaria). There were 13 attacks against humanitarian non-governmental organizations, resulting in the deaths of three humanitarian workers. Criminality and social disturbances continued to pose threats and security risks to United Nations staff, premises and operations. The illegal detention of six national police officers in the PK-5 neighbourhood in Bangui by a self-defence group on 20 June resulted in 12 United Nations vehicles being attacked and damaged.

XV. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

69. During the reporting period, MINUSCA received 16 serious misconduct complaints, including 11 relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, of which 1 involved a United Nations contractor and 6 referred to older incidents committed before 2014 by troops serving under the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic.

70. The Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse visited MINUSCA from 7 to 11 April and met with Mission leadership and uniformed and civilian personnel involved in the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as representatives of the United Nations country team and international non-governmental organizations.

71. MINUSCA intensified its efforts to reduce misconduct and sexual exploitation and abuse by undertaking regular risk assessment visits to the accommodation sites of uniformed personnel, sending out patrols, and providing bimonthly induction and specialized training for uniformed personnel and sexual exploitation and abuse focal points, including in relation to the conduct of investigations by immediate response teams. In coordination with local authorities, religious and community leaders, young people and women's groups, MINUSCA conducted outreach activities on sexual exploitation and abuse to local communities living in the vicinity of military barracks and established joint prevention teams, comprising uniformed and civilian personnel from MINUSCA and other United Nations agencies. National investigation officers within each military contingent were appointed and underwent specialized training on United Nations standards of conduct and the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with the applicable memorandum of understanding between the United Nations and troop- and police-contributing countries.

XVI. Financial Aspects

72. The General Assembly, pursuant to its resolution 70/271, appropriated the amount of $920.7 million for the maintenance of MINUSCA for the period 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017.

XVII. Observations

73. Since my previous progress report, the Central African Republic has turned a critical corner. The inauguration of a democratically elected President, his articulation of an ambitious vision for the transformation of the country, the

formation of an inclusive Government and the full operationalization of the National Assembly represent major milestones. Yet, many of the root causes of the crisis remain unaddressed, and the past few months have showcased the magnitude of the challenges ahead. It is crucial to accelerate concrete actions to bring tangible and sustainable improvements to people's lives. I encourage President Faustin-Archange Touadéra and his Government to continue on this path and to work in a spirit of inclusivity, focusing on national priorities that are representative of the hopes and aspirations of all Central Africans. In order for reconciliation to take hold, State institutions and actors must be representative of and accountable to all citizens, and be perceived as such. The long-term stability of the country depends on addressing the political, social and economic grievances of large segments of society. This will require dedication and time. However, it is of key importance to lay sound foundations for these efforts now, through concrete and visible actions.

74. I applaud the President's efforts to engage with the armed groups and to develop a national programme on disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration. I encourage the national authorities to build on these efforts through comprehensive dialogue with the armed groups and local populations and by building on the principles and outcomes of the Bangui Forum. I urge the armed groups to engage in this process in good faith and in a spirit of finding a consensus to ensure lasting peace. I welcome the support pledged to the programme by partners, in particular the World Bank. In line with its new mandated strategic objective, MINUSCA will fully support these efforts through a comprehensive approach, including by facilitating dialogue with the armed groups as required, adopting a robust posture to address any threat to the process by potential spoilers, and supporting efforts to address long-standing grievances, consistent with the relevant provisions of Security Council resolution 2301 (2016).

75. Accelerated reforms in the security and defence sector are an essential element of the comprehensive approach towards the armed groups and are key to creating the conditions for lasting peace. I welcome the President's commitment to reforming the security sector, which MINUSCA is committed to helping to translate into reality. I urge the Government to undertake the reform of the security sector in a spirit of inclusivity with the view to establishing security forces that are balanced, professional and representative of all Central Africans. I also call on the national authorities to endorse the draft national security policy and to undertake the vetting of the defence and security forces, including human rights vetting. The transformation of the defence forces is of particular importance, and I welcome the establishment of the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic, which should play a leading role in this regard, within the framework of broader security sector reform efforts.

76. The urgent reform of the national police and gendarmerie is of paramount importance to ensure that internal security forces assume primary responsibility for the safety and security of all Central Africans. I salute the commitment of the national authorities in this regard and their efforts to finalize the police and gendarmerie capability development plan. MINUSCA intends to rapidly assume its leading role in supporting the Government on the reform and development of the police and gendarmerie, with the support of donors and the United Nations country team. I urge international partners to support these efforts.

77. I am encouraged by local dialogue initiatives to address intercommunal tensions and foster reconciliation and social cohesion. I applaud the work carried out by religious platforms in heading off deep intercommunal divisions. However, I remain concerned about the prevailing intercommunal divisions and recurrent armed violence linked to them, which risk deteriorating into renewed, large-scale conflict. Of equal concern is the persistent sense of marginalization felt by certain minority groups, including in recent instances where their freedom of movement has been impeded. I urge the Government to adopt a national reconciliation strategy and to actively promote reconciliation at all levels of society to address the deep intercommunal divisions and ensure respect for the freedom of movement for all. The United Nations remains fully committed to supporting national actors in these efforts.

78. In order to achieve lasting peace and stability, national reconciliation and social cohesion must go hand in hand with efforts to fight impunity. I am concerned that the fight against impunity continues to be hampered by capacity constraints and structural and logistical constraints imposed by the judicial institutions, as well as by a lack of political will and allegations of double standards. The swift establishment of the Special Criminal Court remains a priority and I welcome the undertaking by the Government to select and appoint magistrates, in particular the Special Prosecutor, before the end of the year. These efforts should also be geared towards strengthening the national judicial system and be supported by the implementation of a human rights mapping effort to inventory the most serious human rights violations and the adoption of a balanced national prosecution strategy targeting all parties allegedly involved in serious crimes, as well as through programmes for the protection of victims and witnesses.

79. The challenges facing the Central African Republic remain daunting, but progress is being made. It will be important to ensure that the various aspects of peace consolidation and peacebuilding mentioned above are pursued in a concerted manner. In this regard, I welcome the continued commitment of regional and other international actors, who continue to play a critical role in peace consolidation efforts in the country. At the same time, expectations will need to be managed, and priorities set. I will regularly report on progress made towards the strategic objective and priorities set out in resolution 2301 (2016), and will continue to draw the attention of the international community to areas where further assistance is required.

80. I remain deeply concerned that, despite the progress made on the political and security front, the dire humanitarian situation in the country has not improved, and humanitarian aid delivery is hampered by continued attacks on humanitarian workers. Two thirds of the Central African people have no access to safe water or basic health care in an environment frequently exposed to epidemic outbreaks. Large segments of the population continue to be internally displaced, to be exposed to protection-related risks and to live in enclaves, while some 460,000 refugees have not yet been able to return home. I call upon all national actors to allow unhindered and safe access of humanitarian actors to those in need, including the most isolated and vulnerable populations. I urge the national authorities, with support from the humanitarian community, MINUSCA and international partners, to accelerate efforts to create the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as to ensure their safety, freedom of movement and

basic rights. I call upon the international community to urgently bridge the financial gap in meeting the most basic humanitarian needs of the country.

81. The country has achieved remarkable progress in 2016. But the path towards lasting peace and stability will remain elusive without the unwavering support of the international community. The lack of investment, in both people and infrastructure, from which the Central African Republic has suffered must be reversed. This will require significant amounts of assistance until the country becomes self-reliant. Together, the Central African Republic's partners must ensure that the collective efforts and investments made so far are matched by continued, long-term engagement and the sustained provision of resources to address the root causes of the crisis, in close partnership with the Central Africans. In this regard, I welcome the initiative by the Central African authorities to develop a framework of mutual accountability that should help to solidify a durable partnership between the Central African Republic and its international partners so as to ensure sustained international engagement in the country. The recovery and peacebuilding needs of the Central African Republic, jointly supported by the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank, also required the assistance of the wider international community. I urge Member States and regional and international organizations, including non-traditional donors to the country, to make generous contributions to the Central African Republic at the international conference to be held in Brussels on 17 November.

82. I wish to thank the President for attending the ministerial meeting chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General on the margins of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in New York. The meeting helped to bring together some of the key partners of the Central African Republic to express support for the President's vision, while underlining the need to pursue an inclusive political process and to focus on essential stabilization priorities. It also helped to prepare for the meeting scheduled to be held in the coming weeks in Washington, D.C., which will focus on recovery and peacebuilding, as well as for the donors' conference to be convened by the European Union in November.

83. I am grateful to the Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his tireless efforts in carrying out the Mission's mandate. I am deeply appreciative of the work carried out by the personnel of MINUSCA and the United Nations country team in a demanding environment. I am also grateful to my Special Representative for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily, for his engagement in the subregion in coordination with MINUSCA. I am grateful to the European Union for its continued engagement, including through the deployment of the Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic. I thank the African Union, troop- and police-contributing countries, the Economic Community of Central African States, the World Bank, international partners and multilateral and non-governmental organizations for their continued engagement in working towards a better future for all Central Africans.